Iowa Farm Science

Volume 25 | Number 3 Article 6

11-1970

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LIVESTOCK FENCES of Uruguay and Argentina's Pampas

by V. J. Morford

LIVESTOCK fences in Latin America differ greatly from fences in the United States. Barbed wire and woven wire fences are not used in South America. Yet livestock are apparently well controlled. Most fences there are built to control both cattle and sheep. Control of these animals and the elimination of damage to their hides and fleeces are of major concern in fence design and construction.

Fences apparently are constructed in similar manner throughout most of Latin America. However a special study was made of the fencing procedures in Uruguay and The Pampas of Argentina. The "Rural Code" of Uruguay specifies the requirements for a legal fence (Figure 1). This fence requires 7 wires, however fences built to control only cattle usually have 5 wires. The wires usually are all smooth, however, one may be barbed.

The following is a translation from Spanish to English with conversion from metric to English measurements from the Rural Code, Republic of Uruguay.

All the fences separating a site from a farm or from public roads must have 7 wires and must be built to conform with the topography.

The distance from the soil to the highest wire will be 4.3'; from the first to the second wire 5.5"; from the third to the fourth 6.3"; from the fourth to the fifth 7.8"; from the fifth to the sixth 9.8" and from the sixth to the seventh 11.8".

The distance between the posts will not exceed 49.2' (15 meters) and 7 floating sticks (piques) will be placed at the maximum distance of 6.5' between themselves. The posts must be made out of hard wood and the floating sticks and wire must be of high quality.

The fences built under these specifications are called "legal type" and must be kept in good tension.

When barbed wires are used they may replace the fifth or the sixth wires. When the fence is dividing two farms, and if the farmers do not agree, the barbed wire must be attached on the side of the fence of the farmer who wants to use it.

End and corner fence assemblies used in building woven or barbed wire fences in the United States are similar to those used in fence building in South America (Figure 2). However, in the United States most line posts are spaced at about 1 rod (16.5') intervals, while in South America the posts are spaced at 15 meters (49.2')—about 3 times the spacing we use. The seven 2" x 2½" x 4' 6" pickets spaced at 6' 6" intervals between the posts

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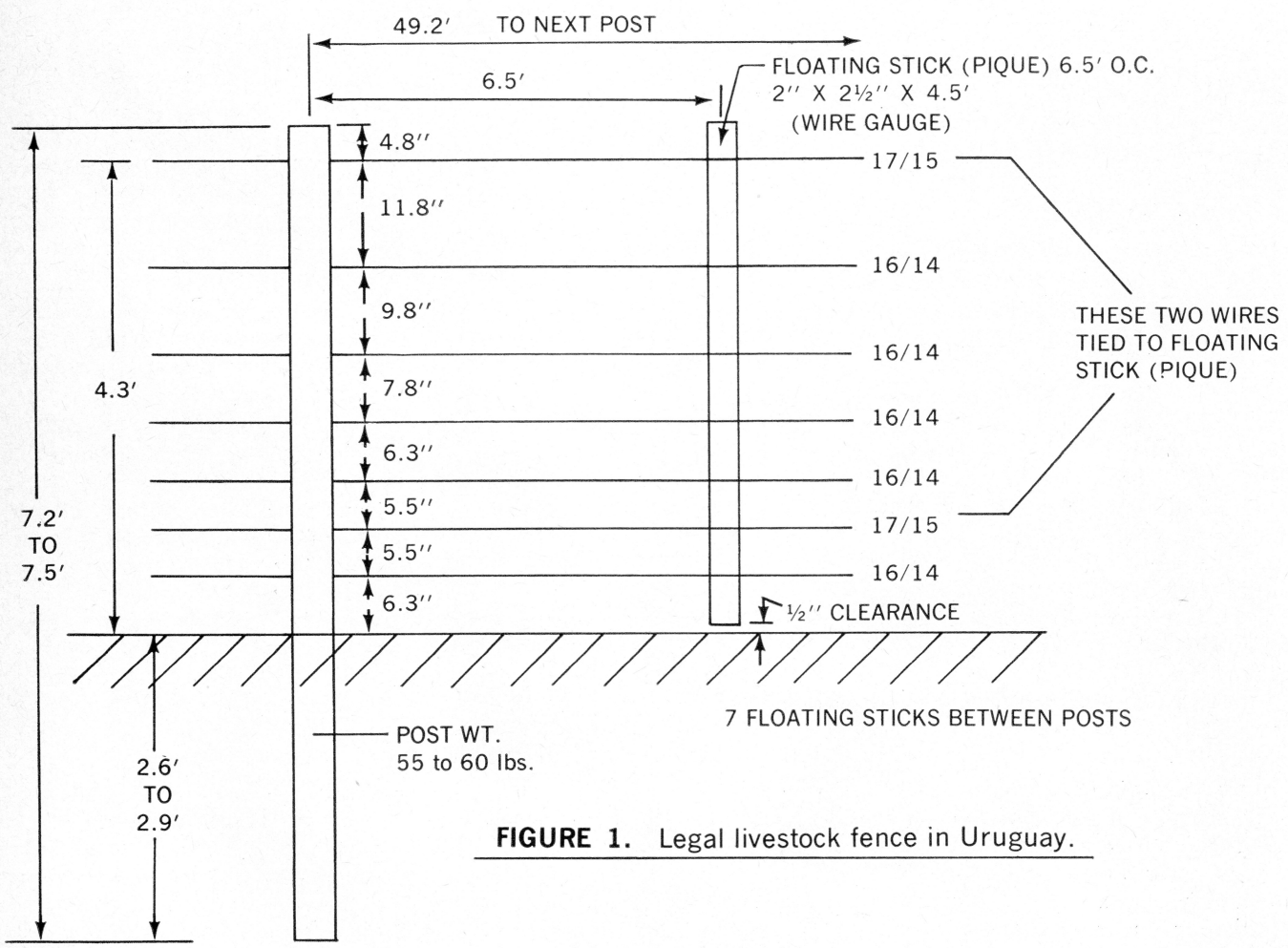


FIGURE 1. Legal livestock fence in Uruguay.

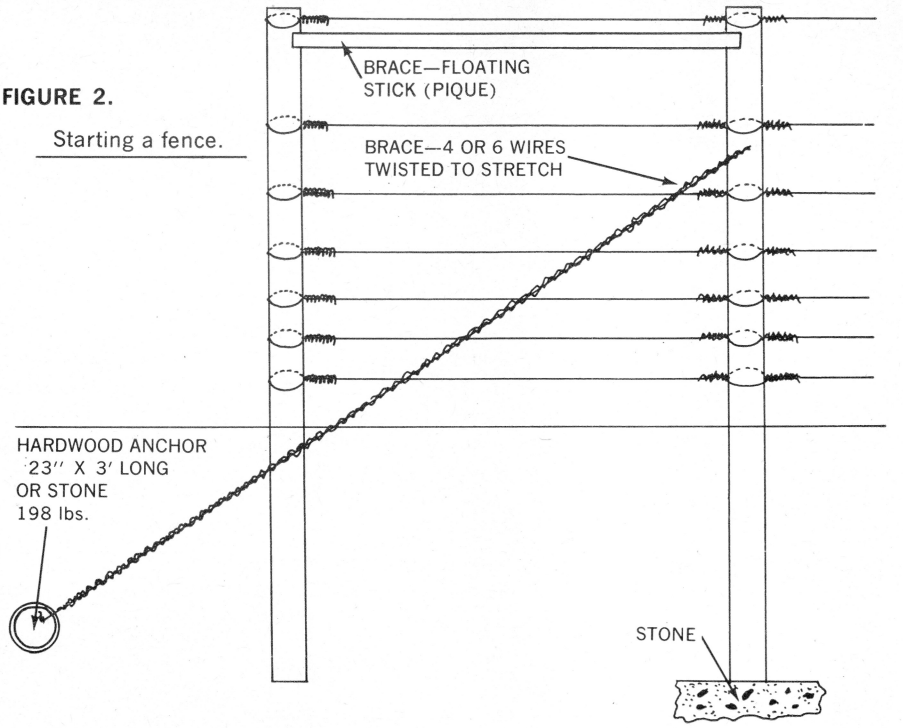


FIGURE 2.
Starting a fence.

FIGURE 3. Tying the floating stick (pique).

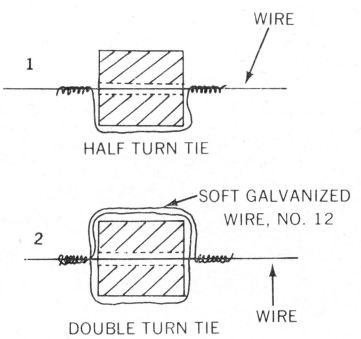
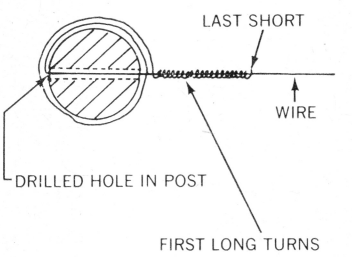
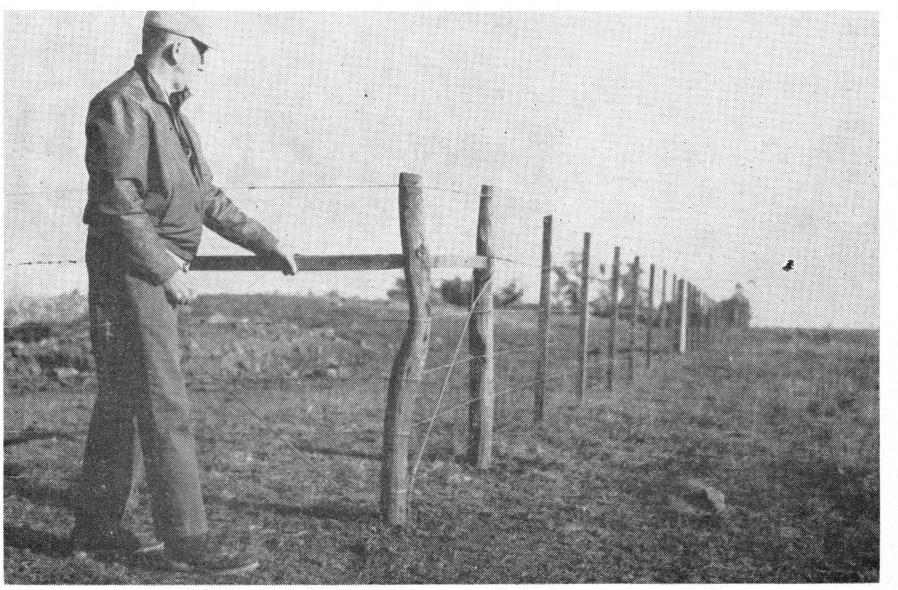


FIGURE 4. Starter or brace post (top view).





LATIN AMERICAN livestock fences look different than those in the United States. The South American system may offer ideas for those with special fencing problems.

provide stability to the fence through this longer post spacing.

Because of the oval shape, the South American wire gauge is designated with a double number, such as 17-15 or 16-14. With the 17-15 wire, the 17-gauge is the measurement through the widest part of the oval. The 15 is the gauge of the narrow section of the wire. In South America, the larger gauge number indicates a heavier wire; in the United States, the larger wires have smaller numbers. The 17-gauge wire in South America compares to an 11-gauge in the United States; the 15-gauge compares to a U.S. 12-gauge. The South American 16-14 is similar to a 12½ and 13-gauge U.S. wire.

All of the wires are drawn through holes that have been bored in the posts and pickets. Wires are tied so that tension can be maintained. Rotating tension devices are used by some.

A similar fencing method is used in the construction of sale rings and holding pens at livestock auctions. Fences used to confine animals closely are usually higher, the posts and pickets are closer together and more wires are used.

Cost of materials is much less in South American fences. There are fewer posts and much less galvanized steel wire. The labor in preboring the posts and pickets offsets some of the labor saved in setting fewer posts.

The relatively small medium hard wire with good tension appears to restrain animals as well as barbed wire. The oval wire provides more strength than a round wire containing the same amount of steel if the wire is positioned so that maximum pressure is applied in direction of greatest cross section of the wire. However, it appears somewhat difficult to maintain this wire in that position.

While we're not recommending the South American fencing system, there may be possible adaptations for either the close confinement of cattle and sheep on general field fencing. This system may be useful for feed yards, sale rings, and holding pens. The use of fewer posts also might be an advantage for stockmen in the western United States who encounter rocky soil.